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Gender, Craft Labour and the Creative Sector

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Abstract

This paper responds to a resurgence of interest in craft labour as an integral aspect of policy generation in the creative sector. It highlights the local, and industrial, cultural, and political histories and processes that create divisions and distinctions within craft economies. Drawing on research with designer makers in Birmingham Jewellery Quarter, the paper demonstrates how gender infuses the responses of policy actors in their regeneration plans for the local economy. It notes the significance of local meanings of craft and how this leads to misrecognition and devaluation. It also illustrates how the economic importance of designer makers is diminished within a policy environment that has had a long standing focus on large scale manufacturing. This leaves designer makers occupying a role that is predominantly focused on their symbolic and decorative value. This bodes ill for cultural policy reformulation that is based on the economic significance of flexible specialisation within small scale, networked businesses.

Introduction

This paper builds on, and responds to, Banks' (2010) concerns to signal the importance of craft labour to the cultural industries. He notes how, in its weight of attention on knowledge workers and creatives, craft labour has been a neglected facet to understanding this sector. However, as Banks notes, a focus on craft workers will illuminate alternative political positions as craft workers are, generally, subordinated to artistic labour. They are also currently threatened by recent transformations of flexible capitalism.

This turn to craft is mirrored in further debates which are central to this paper. In addition to the marginality of craft labour in analyses of cultural industries, craft production itself has become secondary in economic policies more generally. Since the early decades of the twentieth century, policy has been directed toward mass production and hence toward policy concerns with enhancing large scale employment and profit. Small manufacturing of the kind that is the mark of craft business has, in consequence, been viewed as a pre-modern relic of the past (Carnivali, 2003). Yet new economic forms of production have been created in response to deindustrialisation (Bryson and Taylor, 2008). This is particularly the case in respect of niche markets for which craft forms of manufacture are well placed to respond. Indeed, in the cultural industries 'small is beautiful' is not only a more dominant practice. It is also a strong belief and ethic (Leadbeater and Oakley, 1999).

Historical research into craft and artisanship has also drawn on the justice and dignity in this form of production. Strongly identified with the struggle against industrialisation and capitalism, the artisan has been understood as central in the making of the English working class (Thompson, 1963). Informed through Marxist analyses, considerable research on 19th century craft industries drew on the notion

of a labour aristocracy to denote superior skill and political consciousness. As such the craftsman has been viewed as the antithesis of demoralisation and degradation. Sennett (2008) enters this debate with an ethical account of the contemporary craftsman. He argues that a mark of humanity is 'the desire to do a job well for its own sake' (p 9). Such an ethic is embodied in the importance given to producing quality products and in the obsessive attention that the skilled craftsman gives to his work. These values sit uneasily with the culture of a new capitalism because the craftsman's main concern of realising an objective standard stands outside the sphere of monetary rewards.

It is particularly in respect of recent policy calling for a skills revolution in the cultural industries (DCMS, 2008) that Banks argues that 'craft' should become an important focus for new research. His intervention is significant given there has been a demise of value given to craft skills in contemporary workplaces (Gallie, et al 1998; Sayce, Ackers and Green, 2007). Yet, historical research has been prone to depicting the craftsman in terms of heroic masculinity (Clarke, 1995). And, whilst we might think that in these gender aware times such tendencies are a relic of the past, we need to take care not to create new myths of utopian artisanship or neglect the local, and industrial, cultural, and political, processes that create divisions and distinctions.

Banks notes that he uses the term craft to refer to a range of industries including jewellery making. This paper is also concerned with jewellery makers working from Birmingham Jewellery Quarter (BJQ). However, in contrast to the weight in Banks' article which highlights the separation of the roles of craft worker and artist, the research respondents in this paper attempt to hold these two realms together. In so doing they reflect broader professional debates within some sectors of the cultural economy. These debates have been focused on recognising a more complex relationship than the dual status hierarchy that Banks outlines. For example, within creative communities there have been significant struggles over the meanings associated with artistry, craft and design (Lees-Maffei and Sandino, 2004). Whilst always infused with gender through which women's contributions are considered of lower value, there are signs of a current recognition of the importance of interdisciplinarity in practice whereby the divisions between craft, art and design begin to break down. This is reflected in the preferred name of designer maker that is used by respondents who are the focus of this paper. These respondents identify as being both a maker of jewellery, with all the high level craft skills that are required, as well as being an artist and designer of work that provokes sensation, feelings and connections. Sited at the nexus of manufacture/craft and artistry/design, these designer makers therefore inhabit both spaces that Banks' article outlines so well. Such a location remains, nonetheless, infused with a range of status hierarchies that are not only shot through with the distinctions between craft, design and art but also with gender and economy.

The paper begins by outlining the methodological approach upon which this paper is based. It then details the broad cultural policy initiatives that have been pursued by Birmingham City Council together with a more detailed picture of cultural policy in Birmingham Jewellery Quarter. This provides a context for the empirical data that follows. The first part of this considers the meanings of craft and craft worker that are central to the identificatory processes through which designer makers distinguish

their work from others. This includes responses to local policy initiatives for regeneration and development.

The paper then turns to the place of designer makers within local policy initiatives. Birmingham has a long history as a centre of manufacturing industries. However, when it comes to the cultural sector 'some policy makers still have difficulty believing that they are not investing in something 'risky' and intangible' (Brown, et al, 2007: 4). I argue that these risks and intangibles are exacerbated in an area of work that is primarily undertaken by women running micro-businesses. Overall, designer makers are useful marketing tools but the strength of regenerative focus is directed away from their interests.

Methodology

This paper is based on jewellery designer makers who have been hailed by policy actors in Birmingham as one of the vanguards of survival for this area (Pollard, 2004). Numbering around 80, designer makers are mainly women and are either sole traders or micro businesses of fewer than ten employees. Designer makers stand out from mass-market producers for several reasons. They focus on the production of small batches of items or one-off pieces at the higher end of the market; their educational histories include art school degrees or similar; they have links to educational and policy institutions in the city; and they are averse to mass-market jewellery (Pollard, 2004; 2007). In exploring the policy terrain within which designer makers work, and their responses to policy development, a range of data was collected in the period 2008-2010. This includes relevant policy documents concerned with regeneration in BJQ, interviews with established and early career designer makers (15 in total, accessed via snowball sampling as this is a tightly networked community) and with those employed by policy agencies with responsibilities for the area. Interviews have also been conducted with key staff in the Birmingham City University (BCU) School of Jewellery which is located in the Quarter.

Raffo et al (2000) indicate that ethnographic immersion is essential to capture the milieus, networks, informal infrastructures and embedded knowledge of this sector. Accordingly, observational data has also been collected. This has been drawn from attendance at a range of cultural/entrepreneurial events that have been designed to promote the jewellery quarter and the work of designer makers. These include the annual *Brilliantly Birmingham Exhibition* which is organised by Birmingham City Council and through which various events are held over a two month period across the city as well as at craft fairs and other relevant public events. For example, during the summer there is an 'open door' event when the public are invited to meet with designer makers. Data collection has involved attending regular promotions organised through *Birmingham Royal Society of Arts*, which has a gallery located in the Quarter. Documentary sources have also been collected including flyers, promotional materials of individual jewellery designer makers, photographs of their work and of the area and copies of *The Hockley Flyer*, the jewellery quarter trade-to-trade magazine which also carries local news and events.

Cultural Policy Development in Birmingham Jewellery Quarter

Known as the *City of a Thousand Trades*, Birmingham has a long history in small-scale craft based production. One key area for this remains Birmingham Jewellery Quarter which, from the mid-18th century onwards, developed as an industrial village. Referred to collectively as 'toys', artisans made small personal items such as buckles, buttons, boxes, trinkets and jewellery in workshops based in their living accommodation. During its Edwardian heyday, the area employed over 50,000 people (Carnivali, 2003). By 2005, 'employment had fallen to 3102' (Bryson and Taylor, 2008: 8). However, the Quarter remains a significant area of jewellery production within Europe and remains the centre of jewellery making in the UK (Brown et al, 2007; Bryson and Taylor, 2008; Chapain and Comunian, 2010; Pollard, 2004).

The demise of craft manufacture can be seen in terms of the broader industrial history of Birmingham and the wider West Midlands region. Here, the industrial base shifted first to employment in electrical and mechanical engineering and, from the 1950s to the 1970s, more fully toward large scale, mainly automotive, manufacture. The economic success of this meant that, after the South East region, the West Midlands had the highest economic activity rates in the UK with concomitant high wages and levels of employment (Brown et al; 2007). However, the 1970s and 1980s saw a significant collapse in this industry. In response, during the 1980s and 1990s Birmingham sought to diversify into the finance, service and business tourism areas as signalled in its ambition to be the 'meeting place in Europe' (Marketing Birmingham,

http://www.marketingbirmingham.com/about_us/shaping_up_for_success/ accessed 12.01.10). This led to infrastructural development in the form of, for example, the National Exhibition Centre (NEC) and the National Indoor Arena (NIA). Birmingham also endeavoured to invest in other high growth areas such as telecommunications, pharmaceuticals and computer software and hardware services. However, the likely success of this was weakened because policy continued to be over-dependent on the automotive industry (Brown et al, 2007). The strength of this attachment can be seen in the 1999 campaign to 'Save Longbridge' when MG Rover went into receivership. With the loss of some 3,600 jobs, the closure was 'one of the largest industrial failures seen in the UK for some 20 years' (Bailey, Chapain, Mahdon and Fauth, 2008: 4).

The history of the jewellery quarter during these periods evidences successive waves of, not so much regeneration, but reorientation. Indeed, it is testimony to the success of this that the Quarter still survives albeit with a much smaller employment base. Carnivali (2003: 274) indicates that its survival owes much to 'how firms developed the traditional productive system of the district to respond in a dynamic way to the challenges of rapid product market differentiation'. They were able to do this, Carnivali argues, through a mixture of flexible specialisation where subcontracting continues between large and small firms, and where firms invest in the production of goods where design can easily change.

Nonetheless, survival has mainly been accomplished through a strong emphasis on mass market production and, from the 1970s, on mass market retail. For example, during the 19th century, jewellers in the quarter responded to the growth in mass

consumption of jewellery. During the Victorian period, Queen Victoria's taste for ornamentation made jewellery socially acceptable and created markets for the expanding middle class both in the UK and the colonies. During the 1960s, producers also capitalised on the growth of trade in engagement rings which followed the highly successful de Beers '*A diamond is forever*' campaign (Carnivali, 2003). Primarily the area is known for its 'value for money' products where you can bypass the middleman and buy direct. In consequence the main shopping streets are awash with 'sale' signs and the type of jewellery most visible is at the cheaper end of machine tooled and imported mass market gold items and diamond engagement rings. Much of this is viewed by designer makers with some horror not only because it represents the antithesis of their *raison d'être* to produce high quality, skilled work but also because it marks a further devaluation in the area. Whilst St Paul's Square, a key area of development of flats and eateries, is more upmarket, much of the visual fabric of the jewellery quarter bears the hallmarks of its manufacturing past with many unattractive buildings in very poor condition. The plethora of 'cheap jewellery' signs that litter the streets do little to add to an ambient allure of high end designer made products.

Survival has also gone hand in hand with a contracting manufacturing base. From its peak in the Edwardian period, the recessions of the 1920s and 1930s combined with the Second World War to successively reduce trade to an unrecoverable position (De Propriis and Lazzaretti, 2009). Whilst Birmingham was investing in automotive manufacturing in the 1970s and 1980s, the Quarter suffered further as it could not offer the wages and working conditions that were available in car factories. Stagnation ensued and the decision to enter into the retailing trade was a consequence. As a proportion of total jewellery activities in the Quarter, retailing has grown significantly from being less than 5% in 1970 to more than 40% in 2005 (De Propriis and Lazzaretti, 2009).

The move away from manufacturing into retailing for mass markets has also left manufacturers more vulnerable to competition from two countervailing forces. These are low wage economies which can produce cheap, imported jewellery and the high end international producers in Italy, Germany and Switzerland (Pollard, 2004). As a consequence, 'Tough competition from low-cost countries like China, India and Thailand eroded domestic markets; and, at the same time, the export of creative and high-quality output from Italy flooded the European market, reducing the possibility for Birmingham jewellers to penetrate foreign markets' (De Propriis and Lazzaretti, 2009: 1138).

In addition, at the high end of jewellery production, products made in Birmingham continue to suffer from the 'made in Brummagen' imagery. This term, developed during the 18th century, refers to items that are cheap and poorly designed. Birmingham, as a city, also holds inferior status being viewed, and indeed marketing itself, as the 'second city'. This leads to some concealment of the location of production for high quality wares. For example, Birmingham manufacturers produced much of the ware sold through the London based Liberty store in the 1920s but their contribution was obscured by the Liberty London trade mark (Bryson and Taylor, 2008).

Pollard (2004: 174) refers to Birmingham City Council's approach to regeneration in the Quarter as 'repackaging'. This is an apt description as the Quarter forms part of wider attempts to develop Birmingham's vision 'for the creation of creative quarters and centres of excellence as well as leading edge clusters of knowledge-intensive industry' (Brown, et al, 2007: 105). The growing significance of the cultural sector to Birmingham's economic development is signalled in a recent economic impact report on arts based activities which notes that 'In 1991 manufacturing accounted for 24.8% of all employment in Birmingham, by 2005 this had shrunk to 11.5%, and 2009 estimates suggest that levels of employment in manufacturing continue to decline. 2007 figures [indicate] that the arts employ 7,700 in Birmingham – significantly more than mechanical engineering, motor vehicles or printing and publishing' (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre: 2009: 16-17). The report goes on to say that 'The arts can no longer be considered a "niche" market - its contribution to the city's economy rivals that of Birmingham's traditional industries' (p 17).

City-wide Birmingham has focused on a number of spatial clusters of activity which resemble similar approaches to cultural development across Europe (Mommaas, 2004). For example, the Digbeth area houses the development of the Custard Factory within a 12 hectare site of riverside factories built over 100 years ago by Sir Alfred Bird. Redevelopment began in 1990 to house artist studios and small creative enterprises. This has been combined with leisure development in the form of independent shops, bars and nightclubs. An area known as Eastside is described as Birmingham's largest physical regeneration project and comprises a site of 170 hectares. This is conceived as a learning and technology quarter. It includes Aston University, a number of Birmingham City University Campuses, Matthew Boulton College and South Birmingham College together with Birmingham Science Museum and an Imax Cinema. Brown et al (2007) also note that Eastside is becoming a significant centre of multi-media activities, graphic design, visual arts and music production. In addition, redevelopment in Birmingham has strongly focused on building city centre flats and new leisure and retail areas. These include The Mailbox, Brindley Place and a newly designed Bull Ring. It has also pedestrianised areas of the city centre and cleaned up the canals. The cultural aspiration of Birmingham is marked in its, albeit failed, bid to be a City of Culture 2013.

Regeneration policy for Birmingham Jewellery Quarter continues the cluster theme. This was originally based on an urban village model which is designed to build on the past when people lived and worked in the area. The Quarter is a fairly compact area occupying around 107 hectares. Although closely situated to Birmingham city centre, it is however isolated from Birmingham's main commercial and retail core by an inner ring road constructed in the 1960s. Whilst recent plans (Birmingham City Council, 2010) indicate a recognition of the need to build better connecting infrastructure to the city centre, this bounded geographical density combines with a valorised and daily experienced past to contribute to a strong sense of place, cultural heritage and identity amongst jewellers in the district. A sense of place is reinforced by a long standing 'elaborate social division of labour' (Pollard, 2004: 381) of networks and networked workers as jewellery making is based on a combination of medium, small and micro businesses and sole trade outworkers who specialise in particular aspects of production such as stone and bullion dealing, gem setting, casting, finishing, stamping and so forth.

Policy documents indicate a recognition of the threat to the existing jewellery manufacturing and retail base that the Jewellery Quarter Urban Village project posed. In line with how UK policy draws on regional, city wide and local infrastructures (Stevenson, McKay and Rowe, 2010), the Jewellery Quarter Regeneration Partnership (JQRP) was commissioned in 1998 by Advantage West Midlands, Birmingham City Council the Princes Foundation respectively. Its role was to take the Urban Village project forward by creating 'investor confidence in the area and taking the lead in efforts to introduce a wide variety of new uses' (http://www.ihbc.org.uk/context_archive/75/Jewelry/jewelry.html accessed 5.01.11). This included establishing a substantial residential population with around 2,000 new homes, without changing the Jewellery Quarter's natural and very sensitive business 'eco-system', reliant on the many different specialisms which exist within the quarter' (ibid).

The area is also represented by a variety of other interests including the Jewellery Quarter Association (JQA), the British Jewellers' Association (BJA), the Jewellery Quarter Marketing Initiative (JQMI), the Jewellery Quarter Neighbourhood Forum (JQNF) and Centrepiece which is a collective of established designer makers. Within such an array of interests, the competing agendas include preserving the past and inculcating the new. In the case of BJQ these agendas are concerned with the development of historic trails as well as defending older ways of working. They place emphasis on the pleasures of consumption and leisure as well as a continuing concern with economic survival through encouraging an expansion of media and professional businesses and services. Within this mix of interests, designer makers are a relatively new form of business within the Quarter. As mainly graduates from art schools, they are disparaged by traditionalists as not having learnt their skills at the bench (Pollard, 2004). Yet they have the high levels of craft skills and the values and ethos of artistic design which gives them symbolic value to policy actors. Nonetheless, distinctions in the meanings of craft, coupled with low economic value and gendered assumptions of ambition and the long term viability of individual jewellery businesses contribute to further undermine the support for designer makers in the long term future of Birmingham Jewellery Quarter.

Am I that Name?

Banks' (2010) raises the disparity of status between creatives and craft workers as a key aspect for understanding differences of political positioning within the cultural sector. His focus is toward craft as an 'input of the industrial labour process and the attitude or mind-set that configures that labour' (p 305). One way of understanding these issues is through a focus on the professional debates that comprise the ethos of specific creative communities. In this respect, 'For several decades now a major debate within the craft world has been to do with the status of the word itself' (Greenhalgh, 1997: 20).

This debate has taken place within a hierarchy where fine art has been held in highest regard. In consequence, the term craft has suffered a change of meaning and status in its 200 year history. Greenhalgh (1997) notes that in its 18th century use the term craft had no normative reference to making but more commonly meant 'crafty' as it referred to business practice in terms of being cunning or astute. Indeed, Weissbach (1982: 67) notes that, in contrast to the contemporary image of

craftsman 'in 18th century terms, artisans were considered no less artists than were painters, writers, or sculptors'. Through the influence of the English Arts and Crafts Movement, by the early 20th century the term craft stood for a radical position against mass manufacture. One might describe this as the zenith point for the term as, by the 1980s, craft had come to be more closely linked to 'corn-dollies and macramé' (Attfield, 2000: 46).

With intellectual shifts to greater interdisciplinarity there are indications that the status struggle between art, craft and design may be becoming less of a political battle ground. This is because there is a more contemporary focus on convergence or analogous development within these professional groups (Lees-Maffei and Sandino, 2004). The term designer maker marks such a convergence although its history predates contemporary debate. Attfield (2000: 46) notes that in the mid-twentieth century 'a new breed of art-school-trained-designer makers with creative aspirations' were entering the field. Broun relates this history in terms of the furniture making industry (<http://www.designermakers.org.uk/HistoryOfDesignerMakers.html>, accessed 10.11.10). Previously called 'designer craftsman', a group of furniture makers who had come out of *The Royal College of Art* in the 1970s formed a loose group of independent makers. With strong philosophical links to both the English Arts and Crafts Movement of the late 19th Century and with the Art Nouveau movement of the earlier part of the 20th century, they rejected an unimaginative mass production industry and set up cottage workshops. However, the rejection of the term 'craftsman' and its replacement with the term 'maker' was not simply to convey a new mid-twentieth century philosophical and artistic direction or indeed solely concerned with the rejection of low quality global manufacture. Broun also notes that the change of terminology was also to create a distance from the gender specific language of craftsman. He notes "The word 'craftsman' was beginning to be devalued in popular culture with its obvious additional sexist connotation" (<http://www.designermakers.org.uk/HistoryOfDesignerMakers.html>, accessed 10.11.10).

Certainly women form the majority of amateur craft producers and the majority of students in art schools and in professional practice (Lees-Maffei and Sandino, 2004). Recognition through language change provides one route to inclusivity. However, devaluation occurs through other systemic processes. This includes processes of feminisation whereby the status of specific industries become diminished because of the larger proportion of women working in them. Academic researchers in the arts and crafts field also consistently draw attention to the gendering of these status hierarchies in terms of the values attributed to different outputs. There have, for example, been longstanding debates that the separation of craft from fine art has been a major force in the marginalisation of women's work (Parker, 1989; Parker and Pollock, 1991). These values are associated with divisions between public and private and between what is undertaken as paid work and as a leisure activity. Edwards' (2006: 11) research on 18th and 19th century craft practice indicates how 'In the fields of art and crafts, this led to the distinction between amateur women and professional men'. Hackney (2006) provides an analysis of home craft features in women's magazines published during the 1920s and 1930s. She notes that these magazine articles, which included embroidery, rug-making, crochet, simple carpentry and woodwork, were either derided or ignored by professionals because they are so

strongly associated with the feminine. Lees-Maffei and Sandino (2004:212) note that the associations of women with 'amateur and domestic practices, and men with extra-domestic professionalism, remain to be thoroughly effaced'.

These gendered and status distinctions were very salient to designer makers in Birmingham Jewellery Quarter. As Mary, one of the more established designer makers, articulates with some feeling, they do not *do* craft. In Mary's terms craft is derogatory as it refers to hobbyists rather than skilled artists:

We all hate that word craft because it started to have a real hobbyist type of oversight. We just think "We don't do craft" because it's horrible. It's not us not us at all. It is skill if you take craft as looking at the skill of something then yes there are so many different designers and jewellers around at the height of their skill. You ask "How did they do that it's exquisite?" but generally we would call ourselves designer maker or designer jeweller. The word craft we do try and shy away from. (Mary, Designer Maker, Interview 21.03.2008).

This strong association of the term craft with hobbyists leads to quite a contrary view to the one put forward by Sennett (2008) as a term referring to the pinnacle of skilled achievement. Within this creative community, the view of craft is that it is a pastime or leisure pursuit; a diversion from 'proper' work and a form of relaxation; a sideline or indeed a fad. To be thought to do craft conjures up, for designer makers, an image of individuals who work for a supplementary income and who are the antithesis of themselves as serious, skilled and educated artists. As Mary says, those who do craft are:

...people who sit in front of the telly and just stick a few things together and plow it out and try to make a living one day a week. We take it more seriously. (Mary, Designer Maker, Interview 21.03.2008)

The lowly image that craft is not a skilled occupation, and indeed that anyone can do it, is reinforced through the popularity of home-based craft as evidenced in the expansion of retail outlets such as *HobbyCraft*. With over 50 UK shops and plans to increase these to 180 in the medium term, and where total sales for March 2008-February 2009 were £68.7m, *Hobbycraft* describes its mission as 'to awaken creativity in everyone' (<http://www.hobbycraft.co.uk/Pages/Corporate/>, accessed 30.12.10). Perceptions that craft stands outside mainstream economic activity and indeed is essentially a remnant of preindustrial forms of production is also reinforced through the abundance of craft fairs in church halls, at street markets and at various festivals and outdoor events held across the UK and elsewhere.

The importance of understanding the significance of these alternative meanings and their consequent distinctions has implications for the development of a policy which welcomes designer makers as high end producers. Research into the cultural sector consistently notes the gap between policy and its recipients in terms of what is seen as supportive, useful or otherwise. From the viewpoint of jewellery designer makers, policy actors misrecognize the differences between their work and ethos and that of craft home workers. Such misrecognition is experienced in terms of not simply being unsupported in policy terms. It is also experienced more fully in terms of being disparaged and trivialized.

The spatiality of Birmingham Jewellery Quarter includes an area in the centre called the Big Peg around which is pavement space. There is also an attractively lawned area around St Paul's Church. Both of these sites are used to host craft fairs. The policy significance of extending these events as a way of bringing greater consumer trade to the area can be seen in proposals to develop the area around the Big Peg. This new planned development, referred to as Golden Square, is heralded as 'a new focal point at the heart of the Jewellery Quarter for events, exhibitions and markets' (BCC, 2010).

One of the regular events in the Quarter is that of open studios where the public are invited to 'meet the designer makers'. These are usually combined with other events such as street craft markets. Such events are clearly important to designer makers as they provide a marketing opportunity which is supported through wider policy investments and advertising. In describing her dismay at the organisation of one of these events, Jackie, a designer maker of some twenty years standing, illustrates how important the distinctions are between designer makers and craft sellers. A key concern for Jackie in describing her feelings on arrival for the event was the poor signage for the event generally. Within the vein of 'What does it say about us?' she described this as of exceptionally low quality being "just bits of card stuck on lamp posts". "Can you imagine" she said "just how poor quality it was. All this money they [local authority] have and they put up signs like that. They've no idea." Moreover, and marking a signification that designer makers were of less importance to the street craft sellers, there was no signage to her own studio, something she was left to remedy herself.

Jackie's concern was not simply one of preservation of status distinctions in understandings of what constitutes craft work and what does not. As someone well networked within the Quarter, she was also well aware of policy concerns to reorient the area away from its image of a destination for cheap, mass produced jewellery. Nonetheless, the paradox remains that designer makers must necessarily distinguish themselves in this market place from those who sell their work at craft fairs and street markets. Yet, in the eyes of policy actors, they are also – as are many of the craft fare sellers - primarily women running small and indeed often micro businesses. This becomes significant when we consider the place of designer makers in more recent policy initiatives for turning the Quarter into a creative village.

The Honey in the Pot: Marketing the Creative Village

By 2010, the Jewellery Quarter will be acknowledged as the City Region's Creative Village an asset to both Birmingham and the West Midlands. A truly unique area where design quality is an integral feature of its renaissance. A Quarter with a vibrant atmosphere which not only attracts people to work, live, play and visit but acts as a honey pot for creative businesses ranging from the current jewellery business base to arts and media.
(<http://jewelleryquarter.net/about/regenerating-the-quarter/> accessed 24.10.10)

As noted, one of the key concerns for policy development of Birmingham Jewellery Quarter has until recently been the creation of an urban village. Such an approach

has included the development of living accommodation as well as the encouragement of other forms of business to operate from the area. However, the policy statement above contains a slippage from a concern to create an urban village environment to that of a creative village. In this regard, De Propriis and Lazzarretti (2009: 1138) refer to the jewellery quarter as now being conceived in terms of Birmingham's 'Greenwich Village'.

Superficially, the remit to become a creative village augurs well for designer makers. This suggests that the policy brief may become less weighted toward regeneration through residential developments and the expansion of other forms of business which inevitably marginalise jewellery making in the area. It suggests that policy is serious about preserving the range of specialist trades that are essential to the survival of jewellery designer making. However, the broader evidence does not indicate that this is the case. Rather, it appears that designer makers are important as being the 'honey in the pot' in terms of being a magnet for attracting more significant business and tourism. Beyond this, one has to question whether policy agencies are truly serious about supporting their work except in more piecemeal, or even solely rhetorical, ways. In this respect long running concerns about the high business rates of workshops, or investment in the buildings that would give them greater visibility, appear to remain unheard (De Propriis and Wei, 2007).

Designer makers meet the creative village policy brief exceptionally well. Indeed, their attachment to an objective standard outside the sphere of financial reward (Sennett, 2008) is essential. This creates the conditions for ensuring quality and is pursued almost regardless of the economic costs and the potential for profit. Their commitment to producing remarkable objects is sustained by taking on additional work that provides greater regulatory of income or enables them to subsidise their businesses. It also ensures a commitment to remaining in the area. This is despite, as they remark, considerable concerns that as globalisation continues to make its effects felt the number of those working in the ancillary trades that are necessary to their work reduce year on year.

Their value to policy developers is this very symbolic commitment to producing the highest quality work possible. One example is the strongly promoted *Brilliantly Birmingham*, an annual showcase event designed to promote high end design. This focuses on the work of designer makers and promises participants access to 'an extraordinary range of distinctive designs – often one-off inspirational pieces – as well as meet the designer makers and buy or commission their work' (Brilliantly Birmingham 2010, <http://www.brilliantlybirmingham.com/about/>, accessed 29.10.10).

In addition, jewellery designers are emblematic of heritage and are critical for marketing the area as a visitor destination. The historical associations and the existence of two museums and a number of listed buildings in the area together with an historic trail form a strong rationale for the heritage industry. This is evident in the application made by Birmingham City Council in 2010 for the Quarter to be recognised as a World Heritage Site. Despite the fact that the majority of designer makers are women, in advertising craft traditions, it is notable that images of craftsmen rather than women are used (see for example, <http://jewelleryquarter.net/about/sub-page/>, accessed 1.02.11; <http://jewelleryquarter.net/about/suggested-itineraries/>, accessed 1.02.11).

Beyond this the evidence that policy is being directed to more fully support the work of designer makers is rather mixed. The new city plan (Birmingham City Council, 2010) includes a statement directly referring to small jewellery designers as an element requiring support to fulfil the potential of the Quarter. This has to be set against a recent announcement to close the JQRP office located in the Quarter and move its staff to council offices in the city centre. The resultant lobbying to stop this has, for now, enabled the office to remain but, particularly in the light of current government economic policy to cut local authority grants, it is a moot point for how long this office can remain open. It is also the case that investment continues in an incubation project called *Design Space* which takes new graduates for a twelve month period. This provides free bench space, the support of an experienced designer maker as a mentor and business training. It may be here that one can see a renewed focus on the importance of ensuring young people have the high levels of craft skills that Banks (2010) notes in recent government concerns for the cultural sector. Nonetheless, the history of support for *Design Space* is exceptionally chequered as its long-term financial future has always been in question.

Moreover, new policy initiatives have led to minimising the centrality of jewellery production as the *raison d'être* of the area. The latest draft strategy statement from the Jewellery Quarter Regeneration Partnership (JQRP, 2009) makes no mention of jewellery at all in its overarching vision that 'The Jewellery Quarter will become an internationally recognised centre of excellence for the design, manufacture and sale of high value lifestyle and fashion products'. In fact, only approximately one-third of all businesses in the Quarter are now jewellery related. As one policy actor very proudly told me, the area does, however, house over half the architects registered in Birmingham (see also JQMI, <http://jewelleryquarter.net/about/doing-business-in-the-quarter/> accessed 30.10.10).

Regeneration has also included the redevelopment of old factories into flats and apartments. Birmingham's Big City Plan (BCC, 2010) indicates that the area will continue to have a greater concentration of living accommodation. Already the impact of this growing residential population is being felt as the June 2010 issue of the *Hockley Flyer* reflected on its change of focus:

The Flyer has always been a predominately 'Jewellery Trade to Trade' magazine and the cost of advertising reflects that we still cater for the smallest of small businesses, especially in the classified section. Nowadays, because of the influx of residents into the Quarter, it now includes other trades and services and some property advertising. The Flyer keeps its finger on news and environmental issues which affect everyone whether they own a business, work or live here. (<http://thehockleyflyer.info/includes/downloads/June.pdf>, accessed 20.07.10)

In asking why jewellery designers may be considered less optimal for a higher policy value that the notion of being the honey in the pot suggests, one has to turn to the ways in which gender and economy combine. Economics is not only central to the ethos of policy design. It has also become the legitimate arbiter of public values. Through the language of "Is this how you want your dollar spent?" Mayhew's (1999) analysis of US politics illustrates how the broader value issues associated with

competing demands for investment are reduced to a monetary equation. In the case of supporting designer makers, financial values play a large part in decision making because, in terms of future capitalisation and growth, they hardly register at all. Those concerned with the development and viability of the Quarter point to the limitations of market size, turnover and wider employment prospects of designer making as part of their rationale for looking elsewhere for investment in the area. In financial terms, the microbusinesses of designer makers simply do not figure as part of the economic development of the Quarter. The median point for annual turnover of designer maker businesses in the Quarter is £20,000 with £23,727 being the average (Pollard, 2007). Amongst the interviewees willing to discuss the issue of income in Pollard's study, this ranged between £12-£20,000 per annum.

Moreover, a commentary on the 'investment readiness' of the area, rather disparages the micro and small businesses that are the mark of jewellery designer making as lacking in ambition:

The Jewellery Quarter is 'off on a limb', and for some in more ways than geographically. Routes and corridors into the city centre and to other strategic points are not clear and obvious. The Quarter is characterised by micro and small businesses, many without significant ambitions for growth and not using modern business management methods. The area, to quote one contributor, is investment ready (a good marketing term meaning there are lots of dilapidated buildings) and with many businesses in need of re-engineering. Its profile and access is - for an area of such heritage and intrinsic attractiveness – surprisingly weak. (Johnson, 2004: 28)

The notion that women, in particular, lack ambition remains a continuing theme in how stereotypical gendered assumptions feed into policy processes and into the support offered to small businesses by government agencies (Wilson, Brown and Galloway, 2002). Yet, clearly size of business remains important to policy developers in terms of the numerical machismo of a bigger is better policy. As one policy development agency employee put it "They [designer makers] are never going to employ hundreds of people". Such a remark calls forth a past when the largest manufacturers in the area had up to four hundred employees (Carnivali, 2003). Yet, as Carnivali notes, these large firms were mainly concerned with the factoring processes associated with jewellery production rather than making jewellery themselves. This included producing the rolled sheets of gold and silver, wire, chain, dies and stamps and electroplating required by jewellery makers. Jewellery making firms remained comparatively small with the larger ones employing between 30-40 people. Indeed, whilst size and 'ambition' become a mark of progress for policy developers, the association of small and female becomes even more a mark of devaluation. Such a view is also held by another policy actor who commented in rather unfavourable terms on the problems of investing in jewellery designers because 'they are mostly young girls who set up in the garage of their parents' house, get married and pregnant and give up".

Conclusion

This paper has been concerned to respond to Banks' (2010) call that those with interests in the cultural sector might more fully focus on craft labour. This would

enable analysis to more fully convey the complexity and differences that arise from alternative positions and add a counterweight to the dominance that has been given to creatives and knowledge workers. Of key significance in such an analysis is the need to take account of local and professional practices and mores, and to explore how a range of divisions are manifest within the category of craft labour and between craft labour and other employment categories.

When discussing craft labour across a spectrum of industries and professional cultures attention needs to be paid to how these terms are used within specific sectors. Categories are always dynamic as their meanings shift over time and between different constituencies. Designer makers' rejection of the term craftsman marks a cautionary note as, for this particular creative community, the term has become downgraded. This indicates how more consideration needs to be given to the inclusionary and exclusionary processes associated with categorisation. While academic research may now well turn its attention to craft labour, we require far more finely graded understandings of the meanings of such categorisation in respect of those to whom this is applied. Such a point is also of significance to policy actors given that, as this paper demonstrates, processes of misrecognition play into policy practices in ways which are felt to be unsupportive and devaluing. Whilst the designer makers in this study did not refer to gender as a discriminatory variable, as their frustration marks, they were aware that processes of devaluation were operating which positioned them as of lesser worth.

In this regard, this paper has highlighted important issues of gender as a category of division. Academic research into craft labour in the 1970s and 1980s created a strong image of heroic masculinity, something that is not remedied by the title *The Craftsman* of Sennett's (2008) most recent work. A considerable body of work into the cultural industries remains silent on issues of gender and, indeed, other forms of social division such as ethnicity, race, age and disability (Oakley, 2006). Banks and Milestone (2011) draw attention to this through their analysis of some of the enduring features of gender inequality and discrimination in the digital new media area. In the policy responses of those concerned with the regeneration of Birmingham Jewellery Quarter, issues of gender are framed within a strong economic preponderance to favour large scale manufacturing industry. The absence of a publicly articulated discriminatory discourse directly calling on gender issues should not be a surprise in this age of equal opportunities. Nonetheless, there is sufficient commentary to know that this sits under the surface. Thus, it continues to be more politically, and to some extent falsely economically, appropriate to argue for large manufacturing and profit. Carnivali (2004) demonstrates how such a bigger is better view belies the processes of flexible specialisation and divisions of labour that have historically made the Quarter successful. Even at its most financially successful, manufacturers relied on a range of skilled and unskilled outworkers and smaller and micro businesses. As policy turns to a resurgence of interest in craft labour as a route to economic survival it may well be that local policy actors reconsider their ethos. Or they may continue in the ways outlined in this paper and perhaps engage in acts of bullshitting that Belfiore (2009) so aptly outlines. In this regard, one might judge that there may well be continued rhetorical support for jewellery designer makers within a mindset that diminishes and dismisses their value. In this regard designer makers have symbolic value but their economic worth is tremendously marginalised. They are, therefore, useful as a much needed emblematic intermediary as the 'honey' that will attract the

bigger bees. In such a scenario, it is difficult to ignore the continual gendering of economic narratives and policy initiatives that relegate women's investments and commitments to that of mere decoration.

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